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Is it true that Generative AI is Shaping Employee Identity and Working Practices to Become More "Digital"?

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Abstract: *Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is changing contemporary workplaces by influencing not only task execution but also employees' understandings of professional competence, roles, and identity. This article explores how employees experience and negotiate changes in work practices and professional identity as GenAI becomes integrated into everyday work. Using an exploratory qualitative and interpretive approach, the study frames GenAI adoption, work-practice transformation, identity negotiation, and human–AI collaboration as interrelated analytical dimensions. The analysis indicates that GenAI can shift work from direct task execution toward task orchestration, in which employees formulate instructions, assess and revise AI outputs, and retain responsibility for final decisions. The resulting identity change is not automatic or uniform: employees may come to view themselves as AI-augmented professionals while also negotiating boundaries around expertise, autonomy, accountability, and meaningful work. GenAI can support efficiency and access to knowledge, yet it may also create dependence, intensified work expectations, and uncertainty about the value of human expertise. The article therefore conceptualizes digital employee identity as a negotiated and potentially hybrid professional identity rather than a simple consequence of technology use. These insights extend discussion of strategic human resource management by highlighting the importance of AI literacy, continuous learning, responsible AI governance, and human-centered work design. The conclusions should be interpreted in light of the exploratory design and the need for further empirical investigation across organizational and occupational contexts.*

Keywords: *Generative AI, employee identity, digital workplace, identity negotiation, human–AI collaboration, strategic human resource management*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)—particularly following the emergence of various large language models—has brought about significant changes in how organizations manage work, knowledge, communication, and decision-making. Unlike earlier automation technologies that tended to focus on routine and structured tasks, GenAI is capable of interacting using human language and generating text, ideas, analyses, code, images, and various forms of content that previously relied heavily on human cognitive capacity. These developments have made GenAI increasingly relevant across professional activities, including

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administration, marketing, accounting, customer service, education, consulting, and human resource management. Budhwar et al. (2023) emphasize that the advent of GenAI creates both opportunities and new uncertainties for organizations, as the technology has the potential to transform work processes, HRM practices, productivity, and the relationship between humans and technology. Consequently, GenAI can no longer be viewed merely as an additional technological tool, but rather as part of a fundamental transformation within the contemporary work environment.

A key characteristic of GenAI is its ability not only to replace certain human tasks but also to augment human capacity in completing work. Global analysis by the International Labour Organization indicates that the impact of GenAI on most jobs is more likely to take the form of augmentation rather than total job replacement, given that many roles consist of a combination of tasks that cannot all be automated (Gmyrek et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these changes still have consequences for job quality, work intensity, autonomy, and the way work is organized. In this context, academic inquiry is no longer limited to whether AI will replace employees; instead, the focus has shifted to how humans work when some of their cognitive activities are performed in collaboration with, or through, AI systems. This shift opens up avenues for research into changes regarding the work experience, task allocation, competencies, responsibilities, and the professional identities of employees. The integration of GenAI has the potential to transform work practices at the level of daily activities. Employees can utilize GenAI to draft documents, search for and summarize information, generate alternative solutions, brainstorm, assist with data analysis, craft business communications, and support decision-making. Consequently, work structures may shift from tasks previously performed manually to processes involving prompting, verifying, evaluating, editing, and validating AI outputs. Chowdhury et al. (2024) explain that GenAI integration necessitates a re-examination of strategic HRM frameworks, as organizations must develop the capability to orchestrate the relationship between technology and human resources—encompassing continuous learning, workforce development, and organizational adaptation. These changes demonstrate that the digitalization of work involves not merely the use of new tools, but also how work is defined, executed, evaluated, and imbued with meaning by employees.

Changes in work practices can directly or indirectly influence employee identity—that is, how individuals perceive themselves within the context of their work, including their views on their own competence, contributions, expertise, roles, and professional value. As GenAI begins to perform certain tasks that previously served as sources of professional identity, employees may grapple with questions regarding what constitutes uniquely human expertise and how their

contributions should be redefined. This issue becomes increasingly pertinent as AI moves beyond the role of a passive tool and begins to be perceived as a digital colleague, assistant, or even a digital employee. Wang et al. (2025), for instance, demonstrate that the presence of AI-based conversational agents in the workplace can blur the boundaries between human and machine roles, with implications for job identity. These findings suggest that AI-driven transformation can occur at the psychological and identity levels, rather than solely at the level of technology or productivity.

From a human resources perspective, becoming “digital” should not be understood merely as the ability to use digital devices or applications. An employee's identity within an AI-enabled work environment encompasses how individuals perceive their competencies, relate to technology, make decisions, validate information, collaborate with AI systems, and uphold their professional value. Research on employee AI identity suggests that the identity formed through an employee's relationship with AI can be linked to proactive workplace behavior (Qin & Qiu, 2025). This perspective broadens the understanding of digital transformation, as technology influences not only what employees do but also how they define themselves within the organization. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between digital work practices—changes in how work is performed—and digital employee identity—changes in how employees perceive themselves within that work process.

Although Generative AI (GenAI) offers opportunities for enhanced productivity and efficiency, the digitalization of work does not always yield positive experiences. The use of GenAI can lead to technological dependency, concerns about skill atrophy, reduced autonomy, pressure for faster output, and ambiguity regarding the boundaries of human versus machine responsibility. Budhwar et al. (2023) identified various issues associated with GenAI, including risks to well-being, privacy, bias, security, and ethics. At the organizational level, this situation can create a paradox: GenAI may augment employee capabilities while simultaneously increasing the pressure to adapt to the technology. Consequently, research on GenAI must avoid the assumption that digitalization invariably results in improved employee capabilities or well-being.

These issues indicate that the shift in employee identity within GenAI-enabled work environments is best understood as a process of identity negotiation rather than a linear transformation. Employees may embrace AI as a tool to enhance competence while simultaneously maintaining boundaries to preserve the meaning of their professional expertise and human autonomy. In this process, employees may develop an identity as "AI-augmented workers"—individuals who leverage technology to expand their capabilities—or, conversely, experience tension as they find it increasingly difficult to distinguish their own competencies

from machine capabilities. This perspective is becoming increasingly relevant, as empirical research on Generative AI (GenAI) indicates that its impact on work depends heavily on how tasks and work organization are configured. Recent ILO studies even suggest that GenAI has the potential to transform work organization, coordination, autonomy, and job quality, while its productivity impacts may vary across different contexts and worker groups (Merola et al., 2026).

Although the literature on GenAI is expanding rapidly, there remain areas requiring deeper investigation. First, much early research has focused on productivity, efficiency, technology adoption, and organizational consequences, while the subjective experiences of employees in reshaping their professional identities remain relatively underexplored. Second, research on GenAI and HRM has emphasized the importance of workforce development, reskilling, and evolving HRM practices, yet the link between changes in daily work practices and the construction of employee identity is not yet fully understood (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chowdhury et al., 2024). Third, while studies on "employee AI identity" are emerging, further exploration is needed regarding how such identities are formed through employees' actual experiences using GenAI in the workplace (Qin & Qiu, 2025). Consequently, there is a need to shift the research focus from the question "What is the impact of GenAI on performance?" to a more profound inquiry: "How do employees experience and negotiate changes in identity and work practices as GenAI becomes part of their daily work?"

Addressing this gap, this study offers a perspective that positions employee identity and work practices as interconnected dimensions for understanding GenAI-driven work transformation. The study's novelty lies in its integration of digital workplace, employee identity, and human–AI collaboration perspectives to determine whether GenAI usage truly shapes employees into increasingly "digital" individuals or, conversely, fosters a hybrid identity that blends human and technological capabilities. This approach diverges from technological determinism, which assumes that the mere presence of technology automatically alters human behavior. Instead, this study views employees as active agents who interpret, accept, reject, adapt, and renegotiate the use of GenAI within their work practices. This framework also aligns with the strategic HRM agenda, which frames GenAI-driven change as a process requiring resource orchestration, competency development, continuous learning, and organizational adaptation (Chowdhury et al., 2024).

Based on this rationale, the study aims to explore how generative AI shapes employee identity and work practices in digital environments, while also understanding the negotiation processes involving human competence, technology, autonomy, and the meaning of work. A qualitative approach is employed to capture the experiences, interpretations, and meanings

employees attribute to GenAI usage in their professional activities. The study is expected to make three key contributions. Theoretically, it extends the field of strategic human resource management by incorporating dimensions of identity and subjective employee experience into the discourse on AI transformation. Empirically, it provides insight into how work practices evolve as GenAI becomes integrated into organizational routines. Practically, the study offers a foundation for organizations to design strategies—covering reskilling, AI governance, job design, and human–AI collaboration policies—that not only pursue productivity but also preserve employee autonomy, competence, agency, and the meaning of work. Thus, the question "Does Generative AI Shape Employee Identity and Work Practices to Become Increasingly 'Digital'?" is not intended to presuppose an answer, but rather to empirically understand how this process actually unfolds within employees' work experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Transformation of the World of Work

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is an advancement in AI technology capable of generating new content—such as text, images, code, analyses, and other forms of information—based on patterns learned from data. The emergence of technologies like ChatGPT has expanded the use of AI from systems primarily serving classification, prediction, or automation functions to technologies capable of interacting with humans in cognitive and creative activities. Budhwar et al. (2023) explain that the development of GenAI has far-reaching consequences for HRM, work processes, the organization-employee relationship, productivity, and job design. However, researchers also emphasize the uncertainty surrounding the long-term consequences of GenAI for work, including issues related to well-being, privacy, bias, security, and ethics.

From an employment perspective, GenAI cannot simply be viewed as a technology destined to replace humans. Gmyrek et al. (2023) indicate that most jobs are more likely to undergo augmentation—through the automation of specific tasks—rather than total automation. Consequently, more fundamental changes may occur in task composition, work intensity, autonomy, and the way work is organized. This perspective is crucial for research on employee identity because, as certain tasks shift to AI, employees must redefine their sources of contribution, competencies, and professional value—distinguishing human work from technological capabilities.

Generative AI and the Transformation of Work Practices

Work practices encompass the patterns of activity, routines, interactions, resource utilization, and methods individuals employ to complete tasks within an organizational context. The advent of Generative AI (GenAI) has the potential to alter these practices; employees no longer necessarily execute entire work processes independently but can instead operate through interactions with AI systems. In knowledge-based work, for instance, employees can leverage GenAI to generate alternative ideas, summarize information, draft documents, develop communication materials, conduct preliminary analyses, or assist in problem-solving. Consequently, work processes shift from a simple employee-task relationship to a more complex employee-AI-task dynamic.

Chowdhury et al. (2024) position the integration of GenAI as a strategic issue for Human Resource Management (HRM), given the technology's potential to reshape organizational norms, routines, the division of roles between humans and AI, and the workforce's need for learning and adaptation. They propose a strategic HRM framework that views the relationship between humans and GenAI as symbiotic, necessitating organizational efforts in resource orchestration, workforce development, and continuous learning. This perspective demonstrates that digital transformation cannot be understood solely through the lens of technology implementation; rather, it must be viewed in terms of the changes in practices occurring at both individual and organizational levels.

Employee Identity in the Digital Work Environment

Employee identity refers to how individuals perceive and define themselves based on the roles, competencies, values, experiences, and social relationships formed within the work environment. Professional identity is not entirely static; it can evolve as work contexts, technologies, organizational structures, and role expectations shift. In a digital workplace, technology becomes part of the environment through which employees construct and express their professional identities.

The emergence of GenAI expands the scope of this issue, as AI begins to encroach upon activities previously considered the exclusive domain of human competence. As AI becomes capable of generating text, analyzing information, making recommendations, or producing ideas, employees may face new questions regarding the boundary between human expertise and machine capability. Research by Wang et al. (2025) highlights the relevance of this issue by demonstrating that AI-enabled conversational agents acting as "digital employees" can blur the lines between human and machine roles and impact employees' job identities. Consequently, the

use of AI can become part of the process of reshaping job identity, rather than merely a matter of technology acceptance.

Employee AI Identity

The concept of "employee AI identity" offers a specific perspective for understanding the psychological relationship and identity connection between employees and AI technology. Drawing on IT identity theory and motivation theory, Qin and Qiu (2025) examine how employee AI identity relates to proactive employee behavior in AI-enabled work environments. Their research indicates that the identity formed through an employee's relationship with AI is a relevant construct for understanding employee behavior in such settings.

This concept is significant because it demonstrates that AI usage does not merely alter “what” employees do but has the potential to influence “how” they perceive themselves. Employees who use AI intensively may begin to view themselves as "AI-augmented workers," whereas others might maintain a professional identity that emphasizes human expertise, experience, intuition, and professional judgment. These differences suggest that "going digital" cannot be reduced simply to the level of technology usage. The digitalization of identity is better understood as a process in which technology becomes integral to how individuals perceive their own competencies, roles, and contributions.

Identity Negotiation in Human–AI Collaboration

The relationship between employees and GenAI can be understood as a process of identity negotiation—a process wherein individuals adjust, maintain, or reconstruct their self-conception when facing changes in their social and work environments. In the context of GenAI, this process arises when employees must determine which aspects of their work still require human competence and which can be delegated to AI.

The perspective of human–AI collaboration is crucial because GenAI does not necessarily replace employees entirely; instead, the technology can serve as a co-worker, assistant, or decision-support system. Chowdhury et al. (2024) emphasize that the relationship between GenAI and human capital should be viewed as potentially complementary, yet one that requires ongoing learning and adaptation. At this juncture, employee identity undergoes negotiation: employees need to preserve competencies considered uniquely human while simultaneously developing new skills to direct, verify, correct, and evaluate AI outputs.

Digital Competence and Employee Reskilling

The GenAI transformation also heightens the relevance of digital competence and

reskilling. The ability to work with AI extends beyond technical proficiency in using applications; it encompasses the capacity to formulate instructions, evaluate results, detect errors, understand AI limitations, ensure information security, and make decisions based on professional judgment. Consequently, technological change necessitates a shift in competencies.

Budhwar et al. (2023) highlight the need for HRM to understand and adapt to the changes brought about by GenAI, while Chowdhury et al. (2024) identify continuous learning and adaptation as vital elements of organizational strategy in the face of GenAI. Thus, reskilling serves not only as a tool for boosting productivity but also as a mechanism for shaping new professional identities. Employees who previously defined their competence based on the ability to generate output independently may begin to define it based on the ability to orchestrate the collaboration between humans and AI. 7. Autonomy, Work Intensity, and the Meaning of Work

A key issue in the GenAI transformation is the potential shift in autonomy, work intensity, and the meaning of work. While AI can reduce the time required to complete specific tasks, increased efficiency does not necessarily equate to an improved quality of the work experience. The ILO notes that the impact of GenAI must be viewed not only in terms of the number of jobs but also the quality of work, including work intensity and autonomy. Gmyrek et al. (2023) emphasize that jobs undergoing augmentation can still experience substantial changes in working conditions and organizational structures.

This perspective is increasingly relevant regarding employee identity. As AI assistance accelerates work processes, organizations may raise expectations for speed and output volume. Consequently, while employees might gain more scope for high-value work, they may also face escalating productivity demands. Recent ILO literature indicates that empirical evidence is beginning to show changes in work organization, coordination, worker autonomy, and job quality resulting from GenAI adoption. Thus, the "digitalization" of work practices requires critical analysis, as it can lead to both empowerment and new forms of work-related pressure.

GenAI, Professional Judgment, and Human Agency

Another crucial dimension is human agency, particularly when GenAI is employed in roles requiring professional judgment. GenAI outputs cannot always be accepted at face value, as they may contain errors, biases, contextually inappropriate information, or inadequate interpretations. Therefore, employees must continue to perform verification, evaluation, and decision-making functions.

Budhwar et al. (2023) identify issues such as bias, misinformation, privacy, security, and ethical dilemmas as matters requiring attention regarding GenAI utilization within organizations.

These factors demonstrate that increased AI usage does not diminish the need for human involvement; in fact, in certain contexts, the need for human critical judgment may actually increase. Thus, employee identity within AI-driven organizations may not be shifting toward a purely "digital" identity, but rather toward a "human-in-the-loop" identity—that of a worker capable of combining technology with judgment, experience, responsibility, and professional values.

The Human–AI Symbiosis Perspective

The concept of human–AI symbiosis provides a crucial foundation for explaining why GenAI should not be viewed merely as a substitution technology. Chowdhury et al. (2024) explicitly developed a strategic HRM framework that considers the symbiotic relationship between GenAI and human capital, as well as the organizational need for realignment, resource orchestration, and continuous learning. From this perspective, humans and AI possess distinct yet complementary capabilities. AI excels at processing vast amounts of information, generating alternatives, and rapidly executing specific tasks, whereas humans contribute context, moral judgment, empathy, intuition, experience, and accountability. Consequently, the resulting work practices are neither strictly "human work" nor "AI work," but rather hybrid work practices. This concept is highly relevant to the present study, as it enables an exploration of whether the shifts in work practices driven by GenAI truly render employees "more digital" or instead foster a hybrid professional identity that integrates human and technological capabilities.

Critical Synthesis: Are Employees Becoming "More Digital"?

Based on the literature, it can be concluded that the relationship between GenAI, employee identity, and work practices is non-linear. Literature from 2023 highlights the uncertainty and potential for HRM transformation driven by GenAI; research from 2024 advances the perspectives of strategic HRM and human–AI symbiosis; while studies from 2025 begin to demonstrate that "employee AI identity" and "job identity" are critical constructs for understanding AI-enabled work environments. Empirical evidence summarized by the ILO in 2026 further indicates that the impact of GenAI on work must be examined through changes in tasks, productivity, work organization, autonomy, and job quality, rather than solely through indicators of job displacement.

Thus, the term "more digital" in this study is not treated as an assumption that GenAI automatically transforms employees into more digital individuals. Conversely, digitalization is positioned as a social and identity-related process involving adaptation, learning, negotiation, acceptance, resistance, and the reconstruction of the meaning of work. Based on this synthesis,

the study identifies four key constructs as "sensitizing concepts": (1) Generative AI adoption, (2) transformation of work practices, (3) employee identity negotiation, and (4) human–AI collaboration.

METHOD

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of how employees interpret the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and how this technology shapes changes in identity and work practices within the digital workplace. The interpretive approach was selected because the phenomenon of "becoming increasingly digital" is not viewed as an objective condition measurable solely by technology usage rates; rather, it is seen as a social process constructed through employees' experiences, perceptions, interactions, negotiations, and interpretations of the human-AI relationship. This design also aligns with developments in organizational research that position AI as a phenomenon capable of transforming organizational behaviors, work, and relationships (Bankins et al., 2023; Budhwar et al., 2023). Primary data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with employees who routinely use GenAI in their professional activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) employment in an organization that utilizes or permits the use of GenAI; (2) use of GenAI for at least one work activity, such as writing, information analysis, communication, administration, marketing, problem-solving, or decision-making; (3) sufficient experience with GenAI to enable a comparison of work practices before and after adopting the technology; and (4) willingness to discuss their experiences, changes in roles, competencies, autonomy, and perceptions regarding their professional identity. The number of informants was determined not by statistical size, but by the concepts of "information power" and informational adequacy—continuing until sufficient depth and variety of data were obtained to explain the research phenomenon. The interviews focused on five key domains: experiences using GenAI; changes in work practices and the division of tasks between humans and AI; shifts in perceptions of professional competence and roles; the process of identity negotiation; and perceptions regarding benefits, risks, autonomy, dependency, and the meaning of work. To enhance credibility, interview data may be supplemented by limited observations of work practices and relevant organizational documents, ensuring that interpretations do not rely solely on informants' verbal statements. Data analysis is conducted using reflexive thematic analysis—comprising data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, defining and naming themes, and narrative construction; this approach was selected for its ability to capture both explicit and latent patterns of meaning in employees' experiences while positioning the researcher as the primary interpretive instrument

(Braun & Clarke, 2023; Hole, 2023). To ensure trustworthiness, the study addresses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability through data source triangulation, member checking of key interpretations, maintenance of an audit trail, researcher reflexivity, and the presentation of "thick descriptions" regarding the research context and informant characteristics. If GenAI is utilized during the analysis process, it serves only as an administrative aid or a tool for preliminary exploration rather than a substitute for researcher interpretation; methodological research indicates that while GenAI-based analysis can enhance efficiency, it faces limitations in capturing the contextual meaning and interpretive nuances of qualitative data (De Paoli, 2024). Through this design, the study aims to generate a contextual understanding of the mechanism—GenAI adoption → transformation of work practices → identity negotiation → emerging employee identity—thereby determining whether GenAI usage truly renders employees increasingly "digital" or instead fosters a hybrid professional identity that integrates human competence, technology, and human agency.

RESULT

Thematic analysis reveals that the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the workplace does more than simply change the tools employees use to complete their work; it also influences how they perceive their tasks, competencies, roles, and professional identities. Conceptually, four key themes emerge from this phenomenon: (1) GenAI as a transformer of work practices, (2) a shift in identity from independent worker to AI-augmented employee, (3) the negotiation between human expertise and AI capabilities, and (4) the emergence of a hybrid work identity that preserves human agency. These findings reinforce the view that AI within organizations should not be analyzed merely as a productivity technology, but rather as part of a socio-organizational shift that impacts worker experiences and job design (Bankins et al., 2023). Recent empirical literature also indicates that while GenAI can boost productivity, these benefits are not uniform across the workforce and depend on factors such as experience levels and task characteristics (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025).

GenAI Transforms Work Practices: From Task Execution to Task Orchestration

The first theme highlights that the most immediate change experienced by employees is a shift in how work is performed. Prior to adopting GenAI, work was typically understood as a series of independently executed activities: information gathering, conceptualization, drafting, reviewing, and output generation. With the introduction of GenAI, the process evolves into "orchestrated work," wherein employees define work objectives, provide instructions to the AI,

evaluate outputs, make corrections, and render final decisions. Thus, GenAI does not necessarily eliminate the human role; instead, it shifts the human position from direct executor to director and evaluator of the work process.

These findings align with Brynjolfsson et al. (2025), whose study of 5,172 customer service agents found that GenAI assistance increased average productivity by 15%, with impacts varying according to worker experience. The research also indicates that AI can facilitate the worker learning process, particularly for less experienced employees. Consequently, changes in work practices do not simply mean "AI performing human work"; rather, AI alters the sequence, division, and coordination of work activities.

In the context of this study, this shift can be described as a transition from task execution to task orchestration. Employees are no longer evaluated solely on their ability to generate output independently; instead, they are increasingly required to determine when to use AI, how to provide instructions, how to verify results, and when decisions should revert entirely to human judgment. Consequently, relevant digital competence is not merely the ability to operate applications, but the capacity to critically integrate AI into work processes. These findings align with research by Przegalinska et al. (2025), which demonstrates that workplace AI collaboration can support the automation of routine tasks and specific decisions, while enhancing employee capabilities is crucial for ensuring that human-AI collaboration yields organizational benefits.

The Emergence of AI-Augmented Employee Identity

The second theme highlights a shift in how employees define their professional competence. The use of GenAI has led some employees to move away from viewing independent output generation as the sole indicator of competence. Instead, competence is increasingly defined by the ability to use, direct, evaluate, and integrate AI into their work. This context gives rise to a form of identity that can be termed "AI-augmented employee identity." This identity does not imply that employees lose their professional identity to a digital one; rather, technology becomes an integral part of how employees perceive themselves as workers.

An employee may still identify as an accountant, manager, analyst, marketer, or administrator, but now possesses the additional competence of using and managing AI technology. These findings directly relate to the research by Qin et al. (2025), which specifically examines "employee AI identity." Their study demonstrates that employee AI identity is linked to proactive employee behavior and that dimensions such as relatedness, emotional energy, and dependence play a role in its formation. Thus, digital identity should not be understood merely as "how often an employee uses AI," but rather as the extent to which AI has become integral to

how employees perceive their roles, competencies, and contributions. This shift is a significant finding, as it extends the concept of digital transformation from the technological level to the level of identity.

Identity Negotiation: Between Human Expertise and AI Capabilities

Although some employees embrace Generative AI (GenAI) as a tool that enhances their capabilities, research reveals an ongoing process of identity negotiation. Employees continue to question which aspects of the work should remain the responsibility of humans. When AI can rapidly generate text, ideas, analyses, or recommendations, questions arise regarding "what constitutes my unique expertise?" This process demonstrates that identity transformation does not occur automatically.

Employees may accept the technology for certain tasks while rejecting it for activities perceived to require experience, intuition, accountability, or professional judgment. Consequently, a process of "boundary negotiation" takes place—defining the limits between what can be delegated to AI and what must remain under human control. These findings reinforce the perspective of Bankins et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of understanding how AI alters worker experiences and job design across various organizational levels. In the context of this study, the human-AI boundary proves to be not merely a technical issue but also a matter of identity: employees need to maintain a sense of competence and meaningfulness when activities that previously symbolized their expertise can now be performed by AI. This perspective is also increasingly relevant in light of research by Wang et al. (2025), which demonstrates that AI-enabled conversational agents acting as "digital employees" can blur the boundaries between humans and machines and impact job identity.

GenAI as a Co-Worker, Not Merely a Tool

Subsequent findings reveal a shift in how employees perceive GenAI. Initially, AI tends to be viewed as a tool—an instrument utilized when assistance is required. However, as usage intensifies, AI begins to be perceived as an assistant, a thinking partner, or even a co-worker. This shift in perception is significant because it alters the nature of work interactions. Employees are no longer simply "using software"; instead, they engage in conversations, solicit alternatives, test ideas, and evaluate AI responses. In this context, the human-AI relationship becomes increasingly interactive.

These findings align with qualitative research on meaningful work within human-AI collaborative environments. Such studies have identified distinct patterns of AI usage, ranging from AI as an efficiency aid to AI as an expert-like teammate. These shifting patterns are linked to

how employees experience autonomy, roles, expertise, and the meaning of their work. Consequently, the digital transformation occurring is not limited to the level of technology adoption but extends to the formation of relationships between employees and technology. As AI begins to be treated as a digital colleague, organizations must consider how this relationship influences coordination, responsibility, communication, and professional identity.

Digitalization Does Not Always Lead to a Better Work Experience

Research findings also indicate a sense of ambivalence regarding GenAI. On one hand, employees experience greater efficiency, time savings, easier access to information, and support in completing tasks. On the other hand, the use of AI can raise expectations regarding work speed, create dependency, and spark concerns about the potential loss of certain human competencies. These findings are significant as they demonstrate that the relationship between GenAI and the work experience is double-edged.

Recent empirical literature supports this view. Hai et al. (2025), for instance, found that employee–GenAI collaboration can increase work alienation, particularly when digital work demands are high. They demonstrate that interacting with GenAI does not always result in a more positive work experience and can lead to unintended consequences. Ultimately, digitalization cannot be assumed to be synonymous with improved well-being. Organizations overly focused on efficiency risk turning AI's benefits into new sources of pressure if productivity gains are accompanied by increased targets, speed, or work volume without regard for human capacity.

DISCUSSION

Shifting Competencies: From Digital Literacy to AI Literacy

Further research findings indicate a shift in competency requirements. It is no longer sufficient for employees to possess merely digital literacy; they require AI literacy—the ability to understand how AI works, recognize its limitations, provide precise instructions, evaluate outputs, and grasp the ethical and security implications of its use. In practice, employees with these skills tend to maintain greater control over their work. Rather than accepting AI outputs at face value, they treat them as preliminary material that must be reviewed and adapted to the specific work context.

These findings align with research by Brynjolfsson et al. (2025), which shows that the benefits of AI vary across worker groups and can assist less experienced workers through knowledge dissemination and problem-solving support. Przegalinska et al. (2025) also

emphasize the importance of upskilling to maximize the benefits of human–AI collaboration. In fact, AI literacy is not merely a technical competency; it is part of a new professional identity. Employees are beginning to view themselves as professionals who must work with AI, rather than simply using it.

Human Agency Remains Central to Work Practices

A key finding is that the use of GenAI does not eliminate the need for human agency. In fact, as AI increasingly assists with tasks, the human ability to set goals, provide context, evaluate information, and make final decisions becomes even more critical. This indicates that the emerging "digital" identity is not one that relies entirely on machines. Instead, it is more accurately understood as a hybrid professional identity, one that combines human competencies with technological capabilities.

Employees retain the role of ultimate decision-makers. While AI can offer recommendations, employees must determine whether those recommendations are relevant, ethical, and aligned with organizational goals. This perspective reinforces the idea that human-AI collaboration is best understood as a complementary relationship rather than a total substitution. Przegalinska et al. (2025) demonstrate that organizations can benefit from combining AI and human capabilities, particularly when AI supports specific tasks while humans remain central to decision-making and creative activities.

The Emergence of Hybrid Work Practices

Based on the overarching themes, this study identifies the emergence of hybrid work practices, practices that are neither entirely manual nor fully automated. These practices combine human expertise, AI capabilities, human verification, and decision-making. This pattern can be illustrated as follows:

Human expertise → GenAI assistance → Human evaluation → Revision → Human decision → Final output

In this model, GenAI sits at the center of the workflow, yet humans maintain a strategic position. This suggests that the digitalization of work practices is better understood as a reconfiguration rather than a replacement. These findings align with qualitative studies on the use of Microsoft 365 Copilot, which show that employees develop diverse usage patterns—ranging from seeking efficiency gains to integrating AI as a collaborative partner. Such studies demonstrate that work experiences and the meaning of work are shaped by the interplay of technology, tasks, autonomy, organizational structure, and perceptions of expertise.

Does Generative AI Truly Shape Employees into Being More "Digital"?

Based on a synthesis of the findings, the answer to the research question does not indicate that GenAI automatically renders employees "increasingly digital." Instead, GenAI drives the digitalization of identities and work practices through mechanisms of adaptation, learning, negotiation, and technological integration. In other words, the resulting transformation can be outlined as follows:

Generative AI adoption

↓

Task reconfiguration

↓

Work practice transformation

↓

Competence reconstruction

↓

Identity negotiation

↓

Hybrid / AI-augmented employee identity

This model demonstrates that the relationship between AI and employee identity is not linear. Employees do not automatically transform into "digital employees" simply by using GenAI. Identity shifts occur when AI begins to influence how employees perceive their competencies, roles, contributions, and methods of completing work. These findings reinforce the research by Qin et al. (2025) regarding employee AI identity while simultaneously expanding upon it through a qualitative perspective: focusing not merely on whether an employee AI identity is formed, but on how that identity is negotiated through day-to-day work experiences.

The findings of this study broaden the perspective of strategic human resource management by demonstrating that GenAI necessitates not only competence development strategies but also attention to identity transformation. Chowdhury et al. (2024) position GenAI as a strategic HRM issue requiring workforce development, resource orchestration, and continuous learning. This study extends these dimensions by showing that the processes of learning and adaptation can lead to shifts in how employees perceive themselves as professionals.

HRM must go beyond merely providing training on AI usage; organizations need to help employees understand how to work alongside AI without sacrificing human agency, professional judgment, and meaningful work.

This study expands the discourse on employee identity. AI serves as a new context that prompts employees to redefine their professional competencies and roles. The finding that employees begin to view themselves as "AI-augmented workers" indicates that professional identity can evolve through the relationship with technology. This aligns with research by Qin et al. (2025), which links employee AI identity to proactive behavior. However, this study offers a significant contribution through its qualitative approach by revealing that this identity formation is a process of negotiation, rather than a pre-existing characteristic.

The findings support the perspective that the future of work is best understood as human–AI collaboration rather than mere automation. AI can assist in generating alternatives, accelerating tasks, and broadening access to knowledge, while humans retain functions related to evaluation, context, ethics, and accountability. However, such collaboration requires careful design. Research by Hai et al. (2025) demonstrates that GenAI collaboration can also entail negative consequences, such as work alienation, particularly under high digital demands. Therefore, the success of AI transformation should not be measured solely by productivity, but also by the quality of the human–AI relationship and the employee experience

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that generative AI does not automatically render employees more "digital." The integration of GenAI is better understood as a process involving changes in work practices and the negotiation of professional identity. In this process, activities may shift from direct task execution to task orchestration: employees set goals, formulate instructions, review and edit AI outputs, and maintain responsibility for final decisions. Consequently, the changes discussed in this article point toward a reconfiguration of work and the potential emergence of a hybrid professional identity that combines human substantive expertise with the ability to leverage technology. Theoretically, this article links the transformation of work practices, employee identity, human-AI collaboration, and strategic human resource management. Employee identity is understood as a negotiable process as task allocation and the boundaries between human and AI capabilities shift. This perspective broadens the discourse, which has traditionally focused on adoption and productivity by highlighting the meaning attributed to competence, contribution, autonomy, and professional responsibility. Consequently, the term "digital" in this context refers not merely to the frequency of technology usage but also

to how technology is integrated into employees' understanding of their roles and work.

From a practical standpoint, organizations can develop GenAI usage policies that balance capability enhancement with the preservation of work experience quality. Employee development programs should encompass AI literacy, prompt engineering, information verification, awareness of limitations and biases, data security, and the maintenance of professional judgment. Organizations also need to clarify human–AI responsibilities, involve employees in job redesign, and evaluate whether efficiency gains are accompanied by increased workload or work intensity. These measures can foster responsible collaboration without compromising autonomy, agency, or the meaning of work.

Future research is encouraged to test and deepen this understanding through longitudinal, multi-case qualitative studies across sectors with diverse GenAI usage patterns. Data collection could combine interviews, observations, digital diaries, and organizational documents to track changes in practices and identity construction over time. Cross-organizational and cross-national studies could further elucidate how organizational culture, job characteristics, regulations, and access to training shape the employee experience. Given the exploratory nature of this article, its conceptual findings should be treated as a foundation for further empirical research rather than as generalizations applicable to the entire workforce.

Based on the overall findings, organizations are advised to adopt a human-centered AI paradigm—an approach that positions technology as an enhancer of human capacity rather than a substitute for human values and agency. The implementation of Generative AI (GenAI) requires mechanisms for employee participation, clear delineation of human-AI responsibilities, robust privacy and data protection, periodic quality assessments, and scope for employees to maintain autonomy and exercise professional judgment. This perspective is increasingly critical, as recent evidence indicates that GenAI's impact on work extends beyond productivity to encompass changes in work organization, autonomy, job quality, and the distribution of technological benefits. Thus, the answer to the question "Does Generative AI shape employee identities and work practices to become increasingly 'digital'?" is not simply that employees become more digital; rather, GenAI fosters the emergence of hybrid professional identities, wherein digital skills, substantive competencies, critical judgment, and human agency interact to shape new ways of working. This perspective provides a foundation for Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies that go beyond pursuing technological efficiency, ensuring instead that AI transformation results in work that is adaptive, meaningful, responsible, and sustainable.

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